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ENROLLED BILL SIGNING CEREMONY

THE NEW GI BILL CONTINUATION ACT

H.R. 1085, AS AMENDED

STATUARY HALL, THE CAPITOL

MAY 19, 1987

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REMARKS OF HONORABLE JIM WRIGHT

SPEAKER, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

This is the first time since I was elected Speaker that we have had a formal bill-signing ceremony -- what we call the enrollment of the bill. This is the final action by the House of Representatives before the bill is sent to the Vice-President or the President Pro-tempore to sign as presiding officer of the Senate and then to the President.

We are here today not only to honor all of those who have worked for passage of H.R. 1085, the Montgomery GI Bill, but in a much larger sense to honor those legions of citizens who have defended this nation for more than 200 years -- and Americans who continue to provide that defense today in every corner of this earth.

I can think of no better way to salute that special citizenry than to make permanent the GI Bill, and that is what this legislation does. It institutionalizes the educational assistance programs available to the men and women of our armed forces as a permanent part of the fabric of our society. That, I believe, is little enough to do for those who interrupt their careers and risk their lives in defense of our nation.

The original GI Bill came, as you know, at the end of World War II. No investment our government ever made has paid richer measurable dividends to us all.

The GI Bill vastly expanded the nation's pool of intellectual capabilities and enlarged the horizons of individual opportunity. It allowed an entire generation of average Americans -- for the first time in our nation's history -- to have a real chance at college education. It produced not only a richer social fabric for our entire nation, it also actually has returned to the United States Treasury measured in dollars and cents many, many times the financial investment in tax dollars.

By making it possible for young Americans of modest economic circumstances to gain a college education, the program helped produce an entire generation of American leadership, including many who are with us in this historic hall today.

Since that time, this GI Bill has continued sporadically, in one form and another, depending upon the whims of the moment. It has varied, been subject to change, and would have expired soon had it not been for the Montgomery Bill.

Now this generation and all future generations of American servicemen and women will be able -- on a voluntary basis -- to contribute a portion of their pay and receive in return from a grateful nation the educational benefits which will allow them to go to college or pursue technical training.

This is no small boon to them, considering the mushrooming cost of higher education which threatens to make it once again an exclusive privilege of an affluent elite. In one important way this bill is an expression of our concern -- our determination, in fact -- that this shall not occur. And this, I am pleased to tell you, will come at no cost to the United States Treasury at least until the year 1992.

I want to pay a special tribute to the gentleman whose name will forevermore be identified with education for our GI sons and daughters -- Congressman Sonny Montgomery of Mississippi, the Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. Let me also thank the members of the committee and particularly Congressman Gerald Solomon of New York, the ranking minority member, and the members of the House Armed Services Committee and the committee staffs who worked for the passage of this bill. We acknowledge with appreciation the support of the many veterans and military organizations represented here today.

It is fitting that we meet in this grand historic room, Statuary Hall, which honors men and women of our nation's history and their deeds which contributed so mightily to that history. The step we take today honors the generations of plain and humble Americans, past and present, without whose sometimes sacrificial service in the nation's military ranks we could not have survived as a nation.

And it expresses a renewed commitment to an old dream, so typically American, and the revival of our determination to resume the march toward a society in which education is exalted in our scale of values and its availability truly universalized.

Thank you.

REMARKS OF HONORABLE G. V. "SONNY" MONTGOMERY

CHAIRMAN, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

This is a great day for the U.S. House of Representatives in that the new peacetime GI Bill, which you, Mr. Speaker, will sign in just a few minutes, originated in the House. Mr. Speaker, you told me back in January that if I had any problems with this bill to come and see you. As you know, I came several times for your help. This bill is bipartisan and we will hear also from Gerald Solomon, Ranking Minority Member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Mr. Speaker, you and many others in this room are responsible for making these educational benefits permanent legislation. Young men and women who obligate themselves to serve our country can now be assured that these educational benefits will be there and will not be cancelled.

The Members of Congress around me played some personal part in passing this legislation. They individually know what they did and I say thanks from the bottom of my heart.

Mr. Speaker, take a look at the different groups assembled here. The community and senior college associations, the veterans organizations, the military associations, the different Secretaries and Chiefs of the Armed Forces, the Department of Defense, and the staffs of the House Veterans' Affairs and Armed Services Committees, as well as the staff of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee -- they all helped bring about this success.

We could not have done it without these groups. I can say without hesitation that in the 21 years I have been here, this is the strongest force ever assembled on Capitol Hill to pass a legislative bill.

The latest figures for March of 1987 show that 81% of all new Army recruits are signing up for these benefits. 76% of Marine recruits are participating; 58% of Navy recruits and 45% of the Air Force are taking advantage of the new program. Overall, throughout all the service branches in March, 65% are participating in the New GI Bill.

This is not a free program. New recruits put up $100 a month for the first 12 months to qualify to receive the $10,800 in benefits. So they do have an investment in their education.

Since the test program began in July 1985, on the active duty side, 292,000 have signed up for the GI Bill. In the National Guard and Reserve, 54,000 individuals are actually going to school right now under this educational benefits program.

We think that by this time next year, over half a million young men and women will either have signed up for the GI Bill, or will be going to school under these benefits.

This program is coming along at the right time. By 1990, the Vietnam-era GI Bill will expire, just as enrollment under the new permanent GI Bill begins to accelerate.

Because of this program, we are getting the brightest and sharpest young people coming into our military, whether under the draft or the all volunteer system.

As evidence of that, I want to recognize eight young men and women who are with us today. They are either in the National Guard or Reserve, or the active forces, and they are examples of the fine recruits coming into the service as a result of the GI Bill.

Because of the people in this room, we have a program that has made our nation more secure and has given young men and women the opportunity to improve themselves, which would never have come their way except for the New GI Bill.

REMARKS OF HONORABLE GERALD B.H. SOLOMON

RANKING MINORITY MEMBER

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for arranging for this first time ever ceremony.

The new All-Volunteer GI Bill is a momentous piece of legislation. It has already more than fulfilled the high expectations of its original sponsors.

It is an excellent readjustment benefit for our veterans and a great recruitment and retention tool for our military.

The New GI Bill has a tremendous future.

The young military men and women who proudly serve our nation will now have new horizons to reach and new opportunities to embrace. I am indeed pleased to note that some of these young Americans are with us this morning.

Mr. Speaker, the All-Volunteer GI Bill will now be permanent legislation. It will officially be called the Montgomery GI Bill as an honor and tribute to the distinguished Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Sonny Montgomery, whose wise counsel and tremendous leadership brought it into being.

Not only veterans, but also National Guardsmen, reservists, and active duty servicemen are in his debt. So, too, is the entire nation.

To you, Mr. Speaker, I also offer my sincere congratulations for your leadership on the bill. You were always there when you were needed. You spoke up -- you encouraged our colleagues to help -- you led the way.

To both you and Sonny Montgomery, I say on behalf of all of us who are here today that you have every right to be extremely proud of this legislation.

Thank you, Sonny, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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